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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

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Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The report is also submitted in response to Assembly resolutions 66/119, 64/76 and 64/75 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/8.

The report describes the major humanitarian trends and challenges over the past year and explores two issues that the humanitarian community must address going forward: the need to build systems to support data-driven humanitarian decision-making and the need to broaden and deepen partnerships for humanitarian response. The report provides an overview of current efforts to improve humanitarian coordination and response and ends with recommendations for further strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. It is also submitted in response to General Assembly resolutions 66/119, 64/76 and 64/75 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/8. The period covered by the report is from June 2011 to May 2012.

II. Background

2. The efforts of the international humanitarian community to improve humanitarian assistance are anchored in the transformative agenda of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Secretary-General's five-year action agenda. The transformative agenda is a process led by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to improve the quality of leadership, strategic planning, accountability and coordination mechanisms in humanitarian response. The Secretary-General's action agenda provides a five-year timeline for humanitarian organizations to agree and implement measures to increase their effectiveness and transparency. These commitments will increase the performance and accountability of the humanitarian community to Member States, donors and the people who suffer in crises.

3. Evidence from humanitarian response in the period covered in the present report shows that there has been progress in addressing critical challenges faced by the humanitarian community, but that there remains significant room for improvement. The report goes on to explore two issues that the humanitarian community must address going forward: (a) the need to build systems to support data-driven humanitarian decision-making and (b) the need to broaden and deepen partnerships for humanitarian response.

4. Humanitarian decision-making must be based on evidence from reliable data, to make the best use of resources. The current humanitarian system often struggles to furnish timely and consistently reliable information and analysis in order to provide an appropriate response.

5. New and diverse groups of people and organizations, enabled by new technologies and global economic growth, are becoming involved in humanitarian aid. The humanitarian community must entertain and allow for a broader network and a more diverse set of partnerships to support these new actors and ensure that they can contribute effectively to humanitarian assistance.

6. The report concludes with a brief outline of the transformative agenda and the areas in which it is anticipated that progress will be made. This is followed by a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the coordination and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

III. Humanitarian action

7. An analysis of emergencies in the reporting period reveals some specific changes in the nature of crises and in the demands placed on humanitarian actors. Two major categories of concern emerge: (a) problems of access, protection and

staff security in new emergencies driven by human rights violations, political instability and armed conflict, such as in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, and in protracted emergencies such as those in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and (b) crises that require an integrated development and humanitarian response to build resilience and that might reflect early manifestations of climate change, e.g. the food security crises in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa and the recurrent floods in Pakistan.

A. Key facts and figures

8. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters recorded 302 natural disasters in 2011, which claimed an estimated 29,780 lives, affected 206 million people and caused $366 billion of economic damage — the highest on record. In 2012, it is estimated that at least 51 million people across 16 countries will need some form of humanitarian assistance.

9. This trend is mirrored by rising contributions to humanitarian funding: contributions to the Consolidated Appeals Process reached $5.6 billion in 2011, while country-based pooled funds received $441.5 million. The Central Emergency Response Fund received $465 million in pledges and contributions in 2011, compared to $428 million in 2010. In 2011, it disbursed more than 91 per cent of its funds to humanitarian partners, including 27.5 per cent in response to crises in the Horn of Africa. The breakdown of funding, particularly within the Consolidated Appeals Process, shows continued sectoral variations with food aid receiving over 76 per cent of required funds, while protection issues, shelter and non-food items remain chronically underfunded.

B. Access, protection and staff security in new and protracted emergencies

10. Crises driven by conflict, human rights violations and political instability continued to pose challenges to effective humanitarian response. Illustrative examples include the Syrian Arab Republic where, following a Government-led assessment mission, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations jointly concluded that at least 1 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. As of May 2012, 50,000 Syrians had registered as refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Similarly, conflict in northern Mali led to the displacement of some 270,000 people and by the end of the reporting period caused 160,000 Malians to seek refuge in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger.

11. Millions of people remain affected by protracted crises. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more than 2 million people were internally displaced at the end of April 2012, due to ongoing conflict in North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga and Province Orientale. Chronic malnutrition and preventable epidemics such as polio, measles and cholera affected people throughout the country. Afghanistan continued to be affected by insecurity and displacement. As of May 2012, there were 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees in addition to some 3 million undocumented Afghans in neighbouring countries and nearly 500,000 people remain internally displaced within Afghanistan. Some 1.75 million people continued to live in camps for internally displaced persons in Darfur, Sudan.

12. Access continues to be a primary challenge and seriously affected humanitarian operations, including in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Myanmar, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Zimbabwe and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

13. The Emergency Relief Coordinator is mandated by the General Assembly to facilitate access to emergency areas. This requires sustained dialogue and the support of all stakeholders. Similarly, the commitment by Member States to distinguish clearly between humanitarian action and political and/or security operations is essential to enable humanitarian access.

14. Where insecurity impeded access, protection of civilians remained a key concern in the period under review. This highlights the need for partnerships with the appropriate local actors who may have faster and better access than their international counterparts.

15. In 2011, increased levels of violence were directed at humanitarian personnel. Independent figures show that in 2011, 145 kidnappings, injuries and killings affected 297 aid workers, compared to 129 incidents affecting 245 aid workers in 2010.[1] Over 90 per cent of those attacked in 2011 were national humanitarian workers, who continue to constitute the majority of humanitarian personnel deployed in the field. During the past decade, most security incidents against humanitarian workers have occurred in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan.

C. Responding to natural disasters

16. The impact of climate change and the increasing numbers of natural disasters have highlighted the need for closer coordination and collaboration between development, security, political and humanitarian actors.

17. In the Horn of Africa, a prolonged drought impacted 10.4 million people, who were in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. As of May 2012, child mortality, disease and malnutrition rates still remained unacceptably high. In the Sahel region, 15 million people suffered a severe food and nutrition crisis. Niger and Mali were particularly hard hit with 5.5 million and 3.5 million vulnerable people affected respectively. A series of storms, torrential rains and floods hit Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, causing hundreds of deaths and leaving millions of people homeless. In the Philippines, 19 tropical cyclones were reported in 2011, compared with 11 in 2010. Tropical storm Washi struck northern Mindanao in December 2011, affecting 624,600 people, causing 1,495 deaths and destroying nearly 40,000 homes. In Pakistan, torrential monsoon rains triggered severe flooding in 2011, affecting over 9.2 million people, including an estimated 5.2 million who needed humanitarian assistance. Food insecurity and malnutrition levels remain high in Pakistan, with chronic malnutrition reported among 50 per cent of children under 5.

[1] The Aid Worker Security Database records incidents of violence against aid workers. Further information on the database is available from https://www.aidworkersecurity.org/.

18. Delivering life-saving support in emergencies is essential, but it only addresses short-term needs. Humanitarian action around preparedness (stockpiling, early warning systems, evacuation planning and simulations) helps to reduce the impact of disasters. However, in order to deliver a long-term solution, more investment in building the resilience of communities through disaster risk reduction is crucial. Humanitarian actors can play a role in supporting and working with Governments, international organizations, civil society and donors on approaches and measures that reduce the risk of disasters. Without such measures, crises can become chronic and recurrent — as has happened in Somalia.

19. Individual elements of these approaches, such as disaster preparedness, livelihood support and social protection, are beginning to be more widely practised. However, building resilience requires a long-term, development-oriented process built around the sustained commitment of Governments, international organizations, civil society and donors. These stakeholders must coordinate and scale up their efforts and make resilience a strategic priority for funding in the short, medium and long term. The appointment of a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, tasked with ensuring regional coherence, coordination and cooperation between humanitarian and development actors and bridging the gap between emergency response and development is a significant first step in this regard. Over the next years, humanitarian and development actors will continue to advocate for and implement resilience-based approaches.

IV. Two major challenges

A. Data-driven decision-making

20. Humanitarian action seeks to reduce the potential impact of a crisis through support for preparedness and to alleviate suffering by responding to immediate needs. In both areas, well-informed decision-making is imperative in determining the allocation of resources. Yet consistent strategic planning and prioritization, based on reliable information and analysis, remain a challenge for the humanitarian community. Multiple evaluations of the humanitarian response, for example in Haiti and Somalia, suggest fundamental problems with the gathering and use of data, including difficulty in finding reliable and updated baseline information.

21. In preparedness efforts, Governments and humanitarian organizations need to standardize data sets prior to a crisis so that, for example, the locations of key services (for example, functioning health centres or water sources) can be identified quickly. National and subnational authorities have a wealth of valuable data on the resources, infrastructures and capacities of their communities, but do not necessarily have mechanisms to enable the sharing of this information. Making this data available to partners and the public can help to drive better decision-making. For example, the Kenya Open Data Initiative (http://opendata.go.ke) enables anyone to locate health facilities, while presenting broader developmental, demographic and statistical data that could be invaluable in a crisis. The United Nations, and in particular the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, is ready to work with Member States to help ensure that the necessary technical infrastructure is in place and that international humanitarian systems can access the data held by Member States.

22. During a crisis, data on identified needs must reach responders and decision makers quickly so that they can use it to prepare operational plans, set targets and allocate resources based on a timely and accurate understanding of the situation.

23. In a crisis, needs change continuously. Thus, to allocate resources effectively, a feedback loop from affected communities must be available to humanitarian actors so that the necessary data and information can be verified, validated and adapted to meet changing requirements. This requires a two-way flow of information from communities to humanitarian actors and back again.

24. The United Nations and its partners seek to improve data collection and analysis by investing in the required technical infrastructure to enable data-driven decision-making. Critically, such efforts will also help to increase accountability to donors and those affected by crises.

25. The foundations for this technical infrastructure are common operational datasets and fundamental operational datasets. These standards and adherence to them by relevant actors will allow the cluster system to use information more effectively during emergency response. Standards are also being developed in order to enable more effective data interchange and interoperability and to streamline data collection. Cluster leads and other organizations must update their data collection and information management policies and train staff to adhere to these standards.

26. Sharing data between Member States, the international humanitarian community and local humanitarian workers will also improve the local and national emergency response. Smaller non-governmental organizations and civil society or community organizations often lack access to data that could help them utilize their resources more effectively. Conversely, they may also have access to data and communities that Governments would like to reach. The adoption and propagation of common humanitarian data standards will be a critical first step in facilitating this flow of information.

27. Humanitarian needs assessments are a major source of information in determining resource allocations. In 2011, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee established the multi-cluster initial/rapid assessment approach, which outlines a common process for a rapid and joint needs assessment led by the affected Government in the first two weeks of a disaster conducted under the auspices of the resident/humanitarian coordinator.

28. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, has developed the humanitarian response portal, which is a single crisis-specific website that allows end users to share and visualize information contained within clusters and the international response. For the humanitarian response portal to succeed, cluster leads and members will have to adhere to the common standards described above and stay committed to sharing information. Cluster leads and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also need to ensure that there is sufficient analytical capacity to effectively inform decision makers and to better help determine the necessary allocation of resources.

29. These efforts will allow for greater transparency in the humanitarian system, in line with the commitments made by the Secretary-General in his five-year action agenda. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is currently discussing accession to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, which is a

global standard. Membership of the initiative would launch the process of making the financial information of the Office both open and public, in line with international best practices. Similarly, the Office is exploring whether the development of "open data" policies could strengthen information exchange with and between Member States and humanitarian partners.

B. Building partnerships for more effective delivery

30. As humanitarian needs increase across the world, a wider range and a more differentiated profile of organizations and individuals are playing a growing role in the response to them. In tandem, the humanitarian system, created by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182, which sets out the principles and framework for humanitarian action, has evolved over time. However as new actors emerge, the current system has not adapted quickly and flexibly enough to meet the new realities. There is a need to build a more inclusive global humanitarian system, with stronger relationships at the global, regional and national levels. This system must be capable of (a) bringing together the relevant key players in humanitarian response; (b) improving the coherence of humanitarian planning to ensure a more effective response; (c) improving the coordination of needs assessments; (d) deepening the resource base; (e) building capacity across the whole system; and (f) improving accountability to those affected by crises.

31. The memorandum of understanding and three-year plan of action agreed between the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in late 2011 demonstrates the value of partnerships at the regional level. The two organizations were able to display close coordination in the needs assessment exercise conducted in the Syrian Arab Republic and in coordination of the response to the food and nutrition crises in the Horn of Africa and the floods in the Philippines. This collaboration will be deepened through the response to the crises in the Sahel region and Yemen.

32. There are a number of similar types of effective regional partnerships. For example, the Committee on Disaster Management of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) approved the joint ASEAN-United Nations strategic plan for disaster management in March 2012. The plan provides the coordinating framework for United Nations actors, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, across six areas: (a) preparedness and response; (b) risk assessment, early warning and monitoring; (c) prevention and mitigation; (d) recovery; (e) outreach and mainstreaming; and (f) training and knowledge management systems.

33. The past year also saw the establishment of an African Union humanitarian resource allocation mechanism for the drought in the Horn of Africa, linked to the financial tracking system of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The African Union has sought the support of the Office to establish a similar arrangement to mobilize and manage resources for the drought in the Sahel region.

34. Efforts are also under way to deepen partnerships with the private sector, particularly with logistics companies such as DHL. Examples with respect to deepening engagement with non-governmental organizations include the work the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is undertaking with Inter-Agency

Standing Committee partners to hold training events and briefings on the humanitarian system and funding architecture for national NGOs in the Gulf and Turkey.

35. Efforts to find new ways of sharing information and expertise between Member States and a wide range of humanitarian partners will continue. Member States are the primary stakeholders in both the United Nations and in regional organizations and are best placed to ensure greater coherence across these forums, thereby helping to build a more effective humanitarian system.

V. Continued transformation of the humanitarian system

A. Inter-Agency Standing Committee transformative agenda

36. The response to major humanitarian crises has been challenged over the past few years by the floods in Pakistan and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Building on the lessons learned from these two cases and on evaluation and analysis of the response in a number of disasters, the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee agreed on a set of recommendations that will improve the leadership, coordination and accountability of the international humanitarian response, particularly in large-scale emergencies.

37. This set of recommendations, known as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee transformative agenda, commits members to:

(a) Establish a mechanism to deploy senior humanitarian leadership with an appropriate profile from the outset of a major crisis;

(b) Rapidly deploy humanitarian staff with the appropriate profiles at all levels to ensure effective coordination of the response;

(c) Improve strategic planning at the country level, with agreed objectives;

(d) Enhance the accountability of humanitarian coordinators and members of humanitarian country teams for achieving collective results;

(e) Streamline coordination mechanisms in line with operational requirements.

38. Relevant elements of the agenda are being rolled out in Chad, Mali, the Niger, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Committee has approved a field level implementation plan and will continue to monitor and manage the roll-out of the plan over the next year.

B. Progress on thematic issues

Humanitarian civil-military coordination

39. The reporting period saw increased tensions around the deployment of foreign military assets to perform humanitarian functions. At the same time, many Member States are increasing investment in the capacities of their own militaries to respond to disasters. The United Nations continues to actively develop and disseminate crisis-specific operational guidance to Member States and humanitarian actors, based on the United Nations civil-military guidelines. These efforts, particularly

useful in recent crises in North Africa and the Horn of Africa, will continue and increase in response to the demand from Member States for clarity and guidance.

Gender

40. Humanitarian action is becoming more gender and age sensitive. Further progress is needed in enhancing understanding of how gender and age considerations make humanitarian action more effective and in developing the necessary skills and capacities to achieve this. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee gender marker, applied in all 16 Consolidated Appeals Processes and 50 per cent of all pooled fund projects has helped decrease gender-blind projects from 45 per cent to 11 per cent. Over half of all current Consolidated Appeals Process submissions effectively address gender equality, a dramatic increase. Noting a further positive trend, donors are making progressively greater use of the marker to make funding decisions.

VI. Mandated reporting pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 64/76 and 64/75

A. Emergency rules and procedures of the Secretariat for rapid humanitarian response (resolution 64/76)

41. Effective humanitarian response requires the timely deployment of staff and assets. It also requires streamlined financial management. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continues to strengthen its recruitment, deployment and procurement processes to accommodate the emergency requirements of new and escalating crises. In 2011, the Office conducted 113 surge deployments to field offices in countries including Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Libya, South Sudan and the Sudan. By 2012, 75 per cent of its staff will be in the field. Existing emergency deployment mechanisms including the Emergency Response Roster, the Standby Partnerships Programme and the new Associates Surge Pool are being strengthened through the appointment of three roaming senior emergency officers and by the development of new surge guidance aimed at reducing staff turnover and ensuring the smooth transition of staff after a crisis. In order to strengthen and streamline procurement procedures, the Office has implemented a new coordinated procurement strategy to improve cost-effectiveness.

B. White Helmets (resolution 64/75)

42. The White Helmets initiative was established by the Government of Argentina in 1993 to create a pre-identified, standby and trained national volunteer corps placed at the disposal of the Secretary-General and the United Nations to support relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. Between 2003 and 2008, the White Helmets initiative trained over 4,500 local and international volunteers.

43. Under the chapeau of existing agreements, White Helmet volunteers supported the management efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in camps on the Tunisian-Libyan border and World Health Organization primary health-care programmes in Haiti. In 2011, two White Helmet volunteers

were certified as United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team members and joint exercises are currently under way to enable White Helmets to provide further logistical support to UNDAC field missions. The White Helmets initiative has increased its outreach to regional organizations and has recently signed memorandums of understanding with the Ibero-American Youth Organization and the Organization of American States.

VII. Recommendations

Global commitments to humanitarian action

44. I call upon Member States, non-State actors and humanitarian organizations to continue to promote greater respect for, and adherence to, the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

45. I urge Member States to facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and relief consignments to affected communities. Safe, timely and unhindered access to people in need is a prerequisite for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian financing

46. I urge Member States to continue to provide sustained and predictable financing to support humanitarian response, working within the Consolidated Appeals Process and through the Central Emergency Response Fund. I ask all Member States to consider participating in these mechanisms in recognition of the universal character of humanitarian action.

47. I request Member States to examine their own aid instruments, taking into account recent commitments to improving aid effectiveness, to ensure that assistance remains coherent across preparedness, development and humanitarian response. I further request Member States to establish financing instruments that are sufficiently fast and flexible to meet needs during the transition from relief to recovery.

Data-driven decision-making

48. I encourage Member States and humanitarian actors to adopt policies that improve the quality of data, facilitate the open exchange of information and implement global best practices, such as those enshrined in the International Aid Transparency Initiative, in their bilateral efforts in response to crises.

49. I request Member States and the humanitarian community to work with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to develop, agree and adhere to common international standards for the exchange of data to facilitate better preparedness and response to emergencies.

Partnerships

50. I urge Member States, regional organizations and humanitarian actors to actively support outreach efforts with a view to the creation of a global humanitarian community that can effectively cooperate to deliver life-saving assistance to those in need.